

Hamilton-Hoffman House (Burnside)
North side of Cobbs Creek Parkway,
between Sixtieth and Sixty-First
Streets
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1053

HABS
PA
51-PHILA,
252-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HAMILTON-HOFFMAN HOUSE (BURNSIDE)

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Street Address or Location: North side of Cobbs Creek Parkway, between Sixtieth and Sixty-First Streets, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania.

Final Owners: Miss Elizabeth Hoffman, 1106 Touraine Apartments, 1520 Spruce Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and her brother, J. Kenneth Hoffman.

Final Occupant: Miss Elizabeth Hoffman until the house was demolished in 1960.

Final Use: Private residence.

Brief Statement of Significance: A fine example of an early nineteenth century country seat, owned by locally prominent Gavin Hamilton.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Gavin Hamilton, Jr. and his father bought 112 acres in Blockley Township, Philadelphia, from James Emlen in 1791 (Philadelphia Deed Book D32, p. 182), the land later passing to the son exclusively. On Gavin Jr's death, in 1831, it was sold at Sheriff's Sale to Samuel Woodward (Philadelphia District Court Book F, p. 49). The following year it was sold to Jacob Hoffman (Philadelphia Deed Book AM 15, p. 205). It has been in the Hoffman family since then, passing to Sellers Hoffman in 1848, to Jacob Hoffman in 1893, and to Elizabeth Hoffman and her brother J. Kenneth Hoffman, in 1955.
2. Date of erection: Between 1791 and 1800.
3. Architect, Builder, suppliers, etc.: Unknown.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Original center hall plan, two rooms on each side, and a kitchen wing to the south. Two stories and attic. Stone wall construction.

5. Notes on alterations and additions: The house itself is substantially unaltered from the date of its construction, except for Victorian porches added to both front and back of house and a small two-story wing added at the north corner. There have been no significant alterations to the interior of the house.

6. Important old views and references:

Old Views: The Philadelphia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and the T Square Club, The Yearbook of the Annual Architectural Exhibition, Philadelphia, 1930 (Philadelphia: 1930).

References: Deed Books, City of Philadelphia; District Court Books, City of Philadelphia; Philadelphia Register of Wills; Interview with Miss Elizabeth Hoffman, owner.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: The farm was purchased by Gavin Hamilton, Sr. and Jr., who were Philadelphia snuff and tobacco merchants, to erect a country seat for Gavin Jr., who apparently was about to be married. A fine large house was erected for the new couple sometime between 1791 and 1800, when Gavin Sr. died. The marriage however, fell through and Gavin Jr. lived in the house alone until his death in 1831. Gavin Sr. was a pioneer of the snuff business in America and had formed a large and profitable business in snuff and tobacco at 13 South Second Street, and later, after 1816, at 122 High Street. They also erected a snuff mill on the banks of Cobbs Creek on part of their Blockly Township farm. One suspects that Gavin Jr. did not fare as well in business as had his father, for the last listing of the business in the Philadelphia directories seems to be 1826, and in 1830, when Gavin Jr. died, he was deeply in debt (Philadelphia Register of Wills, year 1830, No. 152). Although he had a large estate, almost \$35,000 at the first settlement, his debts amounted to about \$32,000. Litigation continued, and in 1836, a second settlement took this remainder of the estate. A Scottish immigrant, he was a prominent and active member of the St. Andrews Society, as had been his father (See Part I, C of this report). Shortly after his death, the house and farm came into the Hoffman family, and it has passed from Generation to generation in their care until it was demolished.

C. Supplemental Material:

[Excerpt regarding Gavin Hamilton referred to above]

Beath, Robert B., Historical Catalogue of the St. Andrew's Society of Philadelphia with Biographical Sketches of Deceased Members, Vol. II, 1749-1913, printed for the Society 1913, pp. 73-75:

GAVIN HAMILTON, SENIOR, member 1778, Secretary 1788-89. Father and son of the same name were both active members and office-holders in The St. Andrew's Society.

Gavin Hamilton, Sr., was born in the same village in Scotland as his kinsman Thomas Leiper, Strathaven on the River Avon, in Lanarkshire, a tributary of the Clyde. He was the pioneer of the snuff business in this country, and it grew in his hands and in those of his son, taken later into partnership, into a large and lucrative business.

It was on the advice of the senior Hamilton that Thomas Leiper came to Philadelphia, who proved to be a most valuable citizen and good soldier in the American Revolution, and, as was Mr. Hamilton, an active member and officer of The St. Andrew's Society.

It appears, from an advertisement in the Pennsylvania Gazette, February 22, 1775, that with Mr. Leiper, forming the firm of Hamilton & Leiper, they had removed from Second Street above Market, to the northeast corner of Water and Spruce Streets, "three doors below the drawbridge, where they will manufacture in the best manner all kinds of snuff and tobacco as usual...as desirable as any imported from London." Later there was a friendly separation of interest, and Mr. Hamilton had a snuff-mill located on Cobb's Creek on the border line between Philadelphia and Delaware counties. On the ruins of this old mill a cotton-mill was built in 1864, which still stands there.

Mr. Hamilton lived in a small house still standing on the grounds at 60th Street and Baltimore Avenue, West Philadelphia; the grounds were purchased by the Hamiltons in 1790 and covered a large area.

Mr. Hamilton is recorded on the Treasurer's books of The St. Andrew's Society as having paid £ 15 when elected a member, November 30, 1778, and was one of the number who retained membership during the Revolutionary War, and until his death on May 20, 1800.

The following, in Poulson's Advertiser, of May 23, 1800, was the only reference there found to one of the most active business men of his time.

"Died at his house on Second Street on the 20th inst., Mr. Gavin Hamilton, Senior, aged 83 years, long a respectable member of society in this city."

GAVIN HAMILTON, JUNIOR, member 1791, Assistant 1792-1802, Vice-president 1814-22. He was a partner in the snuff business with his father, above referred to, and succeeded to his property as sole heir upon his father's death.

During the lifetime of his father, with a view to marriage, he had built not far from the elder Gavin Hamilton's home a larger residence of stone, at 60th Street and Baltimore Avenue in West Philadelphia, and which, since his death, has been occupied by the Hoffman family, one of whose descendants is now a member of The St. Andrew's Society. The marriage, however, did not take place, and Mr. Hamilton occupied the house as a bachelor until he died.

His estate included over 250 acres. He also built a hunting-lodge on the place, near Cobb's Creek, for the enjoyment of himself and friends and for the accommodation, in the winter season, of players on the ice of the old Scottish game of curling.

He died October 12, 1830, and Poulson's Advertiser of October 14th contained this notice:

"Died suddenly on Tuesday morning the 12th inst. at his residence in Blockley Township, Gavin Hamilton, Esq., a gentleman eminently endowed with honour, candour, honesty and benevolence.

"The funeral will pass Market and Broad Streets this afternoon at half-past three o'clock, at which time and place his friends from the city are particularly invited to attend.

"The members of The St. Andrew's Society are respectfully invited to attend as above."

On October 15, 1830, the Advertiser copies from the New York Gazette the following:

"In publishing the death of Gavin Hamilton, Esq., the Gazette says:

"He was in reality a true Scotian, possessed of all the amiable and honourable qualities of a man. The latter part of his life was devoted to literary pursuits in which he was aided by his relatives in Scotland, who forwarded to him every recent work on the arts and sciences.

"The loss of this gentleman will be felt by numerous persons who have experienced for many years the benefits of his philanthropic charities."

October 23, 1830

"A tribute of Gratitude and Respect to the memory of the late Gavin Hamilton, Esq., by one to whom he had been a generous benefactor."

How wide is the breach in the circle late round thee
Where worth in distress a kind patron oft found thee
Hospitality's fled; thou, its soul, art departed
How sad will thy guest view thy mansion deserted
There oft social virtue and wit entertained us,
Though anxious to go, yet their magic long chained us.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This is fine and well-preserved example of a country estate from the early nineteenth century.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent at the time the house was demolished in 1960.

B. Technical Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: Two-and-a-half-story, rectangular building, approximately 30 feet by 40 feet, with a small two-story wing to the northeast and a one-story kitchen wing to the southwest.
2. Foundations: Stone covered with stucco.
3. Wall construction: Field stone covered with stucco.
4. Porches: There is a large modern porch across the southeast front of the house that does not show on the early photograph contained in this book. On the northwest there is a simpler porch of apparently late nineteenth century origin. On the northeast side is a porch which may be original, since entrance to it may be gained through a window-door combination in the dining-room which appears to be original.

5. Chimneys: Large double chimney stacks, webbed between and stuccoed over, at each end of the house, with one semi-circular and three full-size windows between the twin stacks.

6. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: Front door--Doric frontispiece, wood 3/4-round, unfluted Doric columns, flat entablature with some gouge-work decoration; recessed doorway, paneled reveals and soffit that match door paneling; double doors, four square panels each; rectangular, four-light transom above door; original lock; stone stoop; modern lamps on columns.

b. Windows and shutters: Double-hung, 6/6-light wood sash with thin muntins and plank frames. Wood, solid-panel shutters on the first floor, wood shutters with operating louvers on the second floor. One window on the northeast side of the dining-room slides up forming a door to the outside. A paneled reveal under the window folds in two sections, and another panel on the exterior folds out in two sections, forming the door.

7. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: Gable roof covered with wood shingles on main portion of house; standing seam metal roof over one-story kitchen wing; flat roof on two-story northeast wing.

b. Cornice, eaves: On the front of the house is a moderate-size, simple wood cornice of box type, with pedimented center section extending nearly across three windows; the pediment contains a semi-circular window.

c. Dormers: There are two dormers on the southeast front, each having a peaked roof with pilasters, arch-head windows, and cornices. On the rear of the house are three simple, peaked-roof dormers with shingled cheeks.

C. Technical Description of Interiors:

1. Floor plans: Main Portion: Center hall from front

to back with stairs at rear; two rooms on each side of hall. Same plan on first and second floors. One-story kitchen to southwest and small two-story wing later added to northeast.

2. Stairways: Attractive, open newel, open string stairway curved at turn and top. Simple square balusters, scrolled newel at bottom consists of a twist of balusters with an ivory amity button. Applied fluted pilasters and ramped rail on wall side; scroll brackets to stair; paneled underneath stairs.
3. Flooring: Random-width (4"-8" wide) butt-joint pine boards with light finish.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster throughout; ceiling over stairs and center-hall ceiling have circular-leaf motif plaster decoration.
5. Doorways and doors: Handsome, large, six-panel doors, of pine stained mahogany; original brass hardware; butt hinges; double architraves; paneled reveals to doors. In the center hall are a pair of louvered doors with arch-head, fan-light window above, flanked by louvered side panels with 4 fluted pilasters; gouge-work on archivolts with carved keystone, lower half of door and side panels are solid paneled; upper half operating slat louvers.
6. Trim: Chair rail decorated with reeding and gouge-work in center hall and principal rooms. Modillion cornice in center hall; simpler plaster cornice in other rooms.
7. Hardware: Mostly original; brass knobs on doors; butt hinges. Outside doors have excellent locks with original keeps. Attic room has wood carpenters' lock and keeper with original key. Iron crossbar lock on inside of front door.
8. Lighting: Electric
9. Heating: Central heating. Several elaborate and perfectly preserved federal style fireplaces; square brick floors; marble hearths and cheeks; carved figures in mantelpieces; adamesque, large, and elaborate. Fireplaces in first-floor north and east rooms are most elaborate; those in other rooms are simpler, decorated in gouge work. In the east living room and the north dining room, the fireplaces are very fine with elaborate carving and gouge work and mythological figures on mantel. Pennsylvania marble surrounds and hearth in these two fireplaces.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: House faced southeast and was situated in a fenced-in area consisting of a full city block.
2. Enclosures: Modern fence around entire property.
3. Outbuildings: None.
4. Walks, driveways, etc.: Walk from street to southeast front; driveway from street to northwest side of house.
5. Landscaping: Set on city block; landscaped with old trees, mature shrubs, grass lawn.
6. Miscellaneous: The principal mantelpiece that of the living room, first floor, north side, was given to the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1960, at the time of the demolition of the house. Other woodwork from this house was given to St. Peters Protestant Episcopal Church, Philadelphia, for use in a future building.

Prepared by James C. Massey, Architect
National Park Service
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